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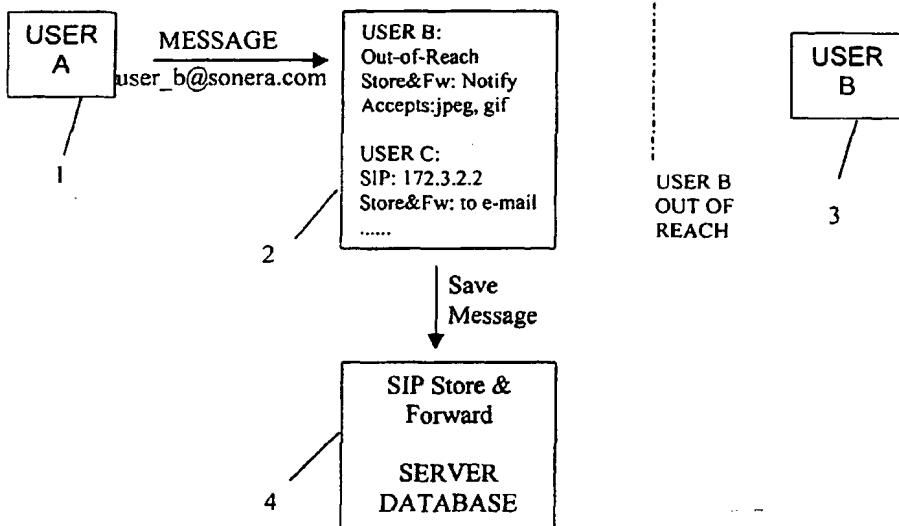
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(54) Title: METHOD AND SYSTEM PROVIDING A MESSAGING SERVICE



WO 02/07396 A1



(57) **Abstract:** The invention is directed to a instant messaging method and communication system comprising one or more network elements, wherein a connection from one to another network element can be established using a protocol which allows the sending of one or more messages from the one to the another network element as part of one or more protocol words. The protocol includes a protocol portion allowing a network element to specify whether or not the message is to be stored in case it cannot be promptly delivered to the another network element. The protocol portion preferably is part of the protocol header. The protocol may be a Session Initiation Protocol (SIP), and the message can be contained in an Invite request sent from the sending equipment to the receiving equipment.

WO 02/07396 A1



For two-letter codes and other abbreviations, refer to the "Guidance Notes on Codes and Abbreviations" appearing at the beginning of each regular issue of the PCT Gazette.

METHOD AND SYSTEM PROVIDING A MESSAGING SERVICE

5 FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The invention relates to a communication method and system implementing a messaging service

10

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Several networks provide messaging services which allow messages to be sent from one to another network terminal 15 without necessity of actually initiating a call. For instance, a plurality of GSM networks support a short message service (SMS) which permits the transmission of short messages. A more recent development is the multimedia messaging service (MMS) which allows the transmission not only of text messages but also of pictures and the like. 20 Both these SMS and MMS are store-and-forward messaging services which necessitate additional network elements (e.g. SMSC, Short Message Service Center) and dedicated protocols such as specified in ETSI TS 23.040.

25

Moreover, the Internet provides a direct user-to-user messaging for chatting or instant messaging (e.g. using Instant Messaging/Presence Protocol IMPP). Further, the Internet offers a store-and-forward messaging, e.g. e-mail 30 service (POP3 "Post Office Protocol, version 3" or IMAP4 "Internet Message Access Protocol, Version 4").

Presently, some instant messaging services are either based 35 on existing standards, or are proprietary solutions such as AOL instant messaging service. Some requirements of future instant messaging services are defined in IETF RFC 2778 and

RFC 2779. The instant messaging service requests both sender and receiver to be on-line and registered to the instant messaging server. When the receiver is e.g. not reachable, no instant message can be delivered.

5

For establishing a bidirectional connection between a caller and a callee, several call control protocols such as SIP (Session Initiation Protocol, see e.g. RFC 2543 and RFC 2543bis) are proposed. SIP may not only be used as a call control protocol but also offers the possibility of being used as instant messaging service. For instance, the SIP INVITE message can be used to carry content payloads (MIME types such as JPEG) inside one protocol message without the need of actually setting-up a voice-over-IP (VoIP) call. 10
Other SIP message types (e.g. INFO) may also be used and new message types may be defined for this purpose. Note that the INVITE message is a signalling message. As an example, a user A may include the following MIME-payloads 15
into one INVITE message for the user B:

20

- image/jpeg (e.g. to send a picture)
- audio/midi (e.g. for playing a sound clip).

All such information fits into one SIP message.

25 Fig. 3 shows one example of using the INVITE message as a messaging possibility. The names and numbers of the messages shown in Fig. 3 are as defined in RFC 2543. First, user A sends an INVITE message (F1) to user B which message includes the payload. User B responds by returning "100 Trying" (F2), "180 Ringing" (F3), and "200 OK" (F4), which 30 confirms receipt of the message. User A then sends a "BYE" message (F5), to user B which acknowledges this message by returning "200 OK" (F6).

35 SIP-based messaging provides the advantage of being usable without need of any new network elements and is therefore cheap, and may possibly replace other messaging services.

However, for performing this SIP-based messaging, both sender and receiver must be "on-line", i.e. user B must be actually reachable.

5

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

10 The present invention aims at providing a messaging service which can easily be implemented without need of new network elements, and which offers enhanced messaging possibilities.

15 The present invention provides a method and/or system as defined in any one of the claims. Further, the invention provides network element adapted to perform the necessary functions.

20 In accordance with one aspect of the invention, the instant messaging service is enhanced by providing a storing capability for messages. When the intended receiver of the message is presently unable to receive the message because he is e.g. not on-line, busy and/or not reachable by the network, e.g. by the proxy server of the receiving user, because of any other reason, the message may be stored.

25 This saving of the message enables its later delivery to the receiving user when this user is able to receive the message, e.g. after re-attachment to the network. No connection for bi-directional communication needs to be established.

30

35 The protocol normally used for initiating a connection enabling e.g. a bi-directional communication between a call originating equipment and a call terminating equipment thus serves the further purpose of indicating whether or not transmitted instant messages are to be stored in case of impossibility of direct delivery. The protocol allowing

messages to be sent from the sending to the receiving equipment as part of the protocol, is amended so as to be able to include an identifier which may be or include a store command. The store command can be, in a preferred 5 implementation a store-and-forward command. A serving network element trying to provide a connection to the receiving equipment in vain, is preferably adapted to check the protocol with respect to the inclusion of such an identifier representing a store command. When the store 10 command is found, the message is not simply discarded but is stored in an appropriate place, such as in an own memory of this network element, or in a storage of another network element such as a server.

15 As the identifier can be included in the protocol, the message and the identifier (e.g. store command) can be transmitted in a unidirectional manner from the sending equipment to the serving network element provided for establishing connections to the receiving equipment. This 20 feature significantly reduces the signalling and traffic load necessary for transmitting and handling messages. In addition, no new protocols for messaging are necessary, and the invention can be implemented in existing networks in an inexpensive manner. Furthermore, no new network elements 25 are necessary for implementing the invention, so that the disclosed technique is easily and inexpensively deployable by a network operator or service provider. This messaging service structure may also replace existing messaging services and hence contribute to a harmonisation of 30 messaging services.

35 The protocol preferably used is the Session Initiation Protocol SIP. The protocol comprises a portion allowing a network element, preferably the sending network element, to specify whether or not the message is to be stored, or stored-and-forwarded, by respectively setting or including

the identifier. This protocol portion is preferably part of the protocol header. The message receiving element which may be the serving network element serving the presently unreachable receiving network element, is able to easily 5 check the protocol header with regard to existence of such a store, or store-and-forward, command, and will decide on storing or discarding of the message depending on the command included in the protocol header (if any).

10 The message is preferable sent in an INVITE request or in other SIP request sent from the sending to the receiving equipment.

15 When the command is a mere "store" command, the message will be stored, and the sending equipment will have to search for any stored messages, e.g. when re-attaching to the network. In case of a store-and-forward command, the system is adapted to automatically forward the message to the receiving equipment. This forwarding may e.g. be tried 20 on a periodical basis, or may be performed when detecting that the receiving equipment can be reached again.

25 The network element providing this storing, or storing-and-forwarding service may be a server such as a proxy server which is already provided as part of existing networks.

In the following, further aspects, features and advantages of the invention will be described with reference to some embodiments as shown in the drawings.

30

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

35 Figs. 1 and 2 illustrate a preferred embodiment of a communication system in accordance with the invention;

Fig. 3 shows the basic signalling messages between user equipments based on SIP;

5 Figs. 4 and 5 show further examples of successful SIP to SIP messaging using two proxy servers;

10 Fig. 6 illustrates the basic structure of a protocol word adapted in accordance with one implementation of the invention (based on SIP);

Fig. 7 shows a flow diagram illustrating an embodiment of a method according to the invention; and

15 Fig. 8 shows a block diagram of an embodiment of a system in accordance with the invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS OF THE INVENTION

20 Fig. 1 shows a first embodiment of the invention and illustrates a case where a message is to be sent from a first network element 1 (user A) to a second network element 3 (user B). The network elements 1, 3 are, in the present embodiment, client or user equipments such as terminals. In the present example, the network element 1 (user A) is an equipment trying to send a message (e.g. "MESSAGE user_b@sonera.com" addressed to user_b@sonera.com) to the receiving element 3 (user B) which is presently out of reach, e.g. switched-off, busy, or located in a non-supported area, or the like. The connection request of network element 1 is handled by a network element 2 which may be a server (such as a proxy server) which provides e.g. CSCF (Call Server Control Function), and/or is a home location server which contains a database storing information on the present locations of network element 3

and further network elements, reachability thereof, and the like.

As shown in Fig. 1, the server 2 stores parameters for several users (user equipments) to be served by server 2. These parameters define the users profiles, network capabilities, and status of the users and terminals. For user B, the server 2 stores the information "out-of-reach"; "store-and-forward: notify"; "accepts: jpeg,gif", etc. This information may be updated by the server 2 or equipment 3 e.g. when re-entering the serving area of server 2, or when equipment 3 wants to change or supplement the types of acceptable messages. The "accepts" field defines the types of acceptable messages. The field "store-and-forward" can be set by equipment 3, or by the operator or service provider of the network to "NO", "YES", "NOTIFY" (when the sending user is to be notified after successful delivery of the message to the user B)", "Forwarding Address or Service for forwarding messages", and the like. The operator or service provider may provide different storing services for different subscribers, such as no storing possibility for normal subscribers, and storing possibility for premium subscribers.

The server 2 furthermore stores e.g. for user C the present IP address "172.3.2.2" for reaching user C, e.g. via SIP. For user C, the field "store-and-forward" is set to "to e-mail" so as to forward any incoming SIP message to the e-mail address of user C. The server 2 preferably contains further information for users B, C and additional users served by this server.

The network additionally contains a network element such as a server 4 used for storing any SIP message not promptly deliverable to the intended recipient. This server 4 is, in the present embodiment, not only used as a storing server

but also as a forwarding server for actively forwarding any stored message to the recipient, e.g. periodically or when receiving information that the recipient is reachable again.

5

As mentioned above, in the example shown in Fig. 1, the user A is trying to send a message "MESSAGE USER_B@sonera.com" to user B using SIP. The SIP message is handled by server 2 which checks reachability of the 10 recipient user B and detects that user B is presently out of reach. The server 2 then checks the contents of its database field "store-and-forward" set for user B, and detects the condition "notify". Server 2 additionally checks the type of received message which, in the present 15 example, may be a type "jpeg". When this type of message is not comprised in the types mentioned in the field "accepts", the message is discarded. Otherwise, server 2 addresses server 4 for saving the presently undeliverable message received from user A. Hence, the SIP message is 20 stored in the database of server 4 and waiting for later delivery to user B.

Fig. 2 shows the embodiment of Fig. 1 in a condition where the user equipment 3 (user B) can be reached again. When 25 the user equipment 3 can be reached again, it will usually send a message signalling its present state or condition, e.g. its intention to receive access to the network. Such a message is shown in Fig. 2 as step 1.) and may consist in a request "register", "PDP context activation", or the like, 30 depending on the type of network and the like. Such a request is addressed to server 2 which therefore recognises the reachability of equipment 3. When detecting this situation, the server 2 sends, in step 2.) of Fig. 2, a message "notify: user B is on-line" to server 4. The server 35 4 checks its database with regard to any waiting message or messages stored for user B. When detecting such messages,

the server 4 sends this message or messages directly to user equipment 3 as shown in step 3.), "MESSAGE USER_B@sonera.com". The server 4 may also be adapted to send a confirmation to server 2 after successful 5 transmission of the stored messages to user equipment 3. The server 2 then preferably sends, in step 4.), a message to user equipment 1 informing the latter on successful delivery of the message to user equipment 3. This message is shown in Fig. 2 as "NOTIFY A: contents has been 10 received".



Furthermore, the server 2 changes the conditions set for user B from "out of reach" to e.g. the address of user B, and/or the field "store-and-forward" to "YES". In the 15 latter case, any message received for user B during subsequent unreachability thereof will simply be stored and forwarded after later reachability of user B, without sending any "notify" message to user A such as shown in step 4.) of Fig. 2.

20 As illustrated in Fig. 2, the server 2 may meanwhile also have changed the contents of the fields for user C from "to e-mail" (Fig. 1) to "NO" based on information received from the equipment of user C or the network operator or service 25 provider.

The present invention therefore guarantees that the message contents (e.g. image or audio contents) of a SIP message is delivered to the receiver even if the receiver should be 30 presently out of reach or occupied. For achieving this function, the invention defines an extension to the syntax of a connection protocol such as SIP which allows the sender to define whether or not the message should be temporarily stored when the receiver should presently be 35 out of reach, and should be sent to the receiver as soon as possible. This local temporary storage of the message is

performed taking account of the present status of the receiver. The storing place may be defined by the sender by adding a storing place address to the message. The storing place may also be defined by the serving server 2.

5

The standardisation drafts for SIP define that there may be a "request-disposition" header to specify caller preferences for the way how a server such as server 2 should process a request. The header can include the 10 following items:

```
Request-disposition = "Request-disposition" ":"  
                      1# (proxy-feature | cancel-feature |  
                           fork-feature | recurse-feature |  
                           parallel-feature | queue-feature |  
                           ring-feature)  
proxy-feature      = "proxy" | "redirect"  
cancel-feature     = "cancel" | "no-cancel"  
fork-feature       = "fork" | "no-fork"  
recurse-feature   = "recurse" | "no-recurse"  
parallel-feature   = "parallel" | "sequential"  
queue-feature     = "queue" | "no-queue"  
ring-feature       = "ring" | "no-ring"
```

15 20 25 The invention extends this header to specify also "do-not-store" and "store-and-forward-if-not-reached", and the like.

30 35 "Do-not-store" means that this message should not be stored (e.g. it is instant in nature). "Store-and-forward-if-not-reached" means that this message should be stored, in a place defined by the sender, since it is important. E.g. if receiver was out-of-reach, this message is stored temporarily and sent to the receiver afterwards, as soon as possible. Usually local proxy (or e.g. yahoo like of proxy) will be the storing place. That proxy will be subscribed to presence status service and waits for a receiver to become on-line. When the receiver becomes on-line, the proxy gets a notification, and sends the message to the receiver. After 200 OK message, the proxy also

(optionally) notifies the original sender that "Message has been delivered", using SIP NOTIFY method.

5 The above-described implementation ensures correct delivery to the receiver as soon as same is reachable again, e.g. after re-attaching to the network or terminating any ongoing call.

10 Fig. 4 shows a basic example of a SIP call performed when trying to establish a bi-directional media connection "Both way RTP media". The example of Fig. 4 shows a successful SIP to SIP connection between users A and B through two proxy servers, proxy 1 and proxy 2. The numbering F1 to F23 attached to the steps of Fig. 4 indicate the flow sequence 15 whereas the words or numbers in front of this step numbering are in line with the definition of the SIP protocol. As the message flow and sequence steps of Fig. 4 are self-explanatory, no more detailed description is necessary.

20 When, in accordance with the above-described embodiments, SIP is used for messaging, no "both way RTP media" is set-up. The flow may therefore proceed, in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention, as shown in Fig. 5. 25 There are several flow possibilities to achieve SIP-based messaging.

30 The INVITE request message sent in step F4 of Fig. 5 contains the message payload (MIME types) sent from user A to user B.

In the following, one example of the INVITE request from user A to proxy 1 is shown:

35 F4 INVITE A -> Proxy 1

```

5      INVITE sip:UserB@ssl.wcom.com SIP/2.0
Via: SIP/2.0/UDP here.com:5060
From: BigGuy <sip:UserA@here.com>
To: LittleGuy <sip:UserB@there.com>
Call-ID: 12345601@here.com
10     CSeq: 1 INVITE
Contact: BigGuy <sip:UserA@here.com>
Authorization: Digest username="UserA", realm="MCI
WorldCom SIP",
nonce="wf84f1ceczx41ae6cbe5aea9c8e88d359", opaque="",
15     uri="sip:ssl.wcom.com",
           response="42ce3cef44b22f50c6a6071bc8"
Content-Type: multipart/mixed;
           boundary=gc0pJq0M:08jU534c0p
Content-Length: 147
20
v=0
o=UserA 2890844526 2890844526 IN IP4 .here.com
s=Session SDP
c=IN IP4 100.101.102.103
25     t=0 0
m=audio 49170 RTP/AVP 0
a=rtpmap:0 PCMU/8000

----- = NextPart_gc0pJq0M:08jU534c0p
30     Content-Type: image/jpeg; charset="iso-8859-1"

R01GOD1huQEFAfAAAAAAAP///yH5BAEAAAELAAAAAC5AQUBAAL+jI+py+0
35     P4wKUyouz3rz7D4biSJZmUAEnl7ZW5lbrTNf2jec6FrvKC+sJhz0IMcWQ7Z
bMpvO5U01RVKnliM1qt9wuFwoOi8dkr/mMTqu35Lb7DRet5/S6nRjP6/d8w
/0PGOjVR1hoyCSYqLgIdOj4CBnCOE1JF3mJmR1Rydn5pQkamnnlWWqqJJqq
anjaaroKG5vnSlspe4tbVrsrmOv7+8QrXAdcbIwzNaw8eNzsvLQcjfRMXW0
jvWytvW1C

40

If there is more than one payload
45     in SIP, then multiparty MIME is used, as shown in the above
example(Content-Type: multipart/mixed;
boundary=gc0pJq0M:08jU534c0p). In the payload itself there
are different MIME-types, separated by boundary.

If user B is not reachable then the immediate sending
50     fails.

```

In order to have a store and forward service in accordance with the invention, several possibilities are described below.

5 1. Using the SIP forward capabilities:

User B has a "forwarding on not reachable" activated at proxy 2 (which may correspond to server 2 of Figs. 1, 2). If User B can not be reached by proxy 2 then the proxy 2 forwards the message to the user's B "ghost user agent" B2, 10 which can be a "connected" device which is always reachable / online, such as server 4. Then user agent B2 periodically tries to forward the message (using the same SIP based messaging capabilities) to the User agent B of the user B. The periodical forwarding timer can be of any kind. It may 15 also be provided that the user agent B2 tries to forward the message only for a certain time and then discards it.

2. Forwarding the message payload to the user's B e-mail address:

20 If user B is not reachable by the proxy 2, then proxy 2 transfers the message payload (MIME type) to the user's B e-mail address (e.g. with SMTP) which may be specified in the INVITE message or which may be contained in a user profile option used by proxy 2.

25

3. Forward to MMS server:

Same as in 2, but the message payload (MIME types) is 30 forwarded to a MMS server. MMS stands for Multimedia Messaging Service as defined in 3GPP 22.140 and 23.140. The message is delivered when user B becomes reachable by the MMS server. This can be part of the user's B profile.

4. Forward to SMSC:

Same as in 2, but the text part of the message (MIME type 35 TXT) is forwarded to the SMSC (Short Message Service

Centre). The message is delivered when user B becomes reachable by the SMSC. This may be also part of the user's B profile.

5 Fig. 6 shows an example of a basic structure of a SIP protocol word adapted in accordance with the present invention. The protocol word contains a header 11 which, in accordance with the invention, includes a "store command" field (as part of the protocol word). The "store command" 10 field represents or includes an identifier which may be set, by the sender of the message, to the settings "store", "store-and-forward", "notify", or "do not store". The protocol word furthermore contains a message portion 12 containing a message e.g. of MIME type, and the usual end 15 field 13.

In this example, a SIP INVITE message is used for carrying the payload, wherein the payload is inserted into the MIME field 12. When the receiving user B has activated 20 "forwarding on not reachable" in his/her proxy server 2, the proxy server 2 will forward any received SIP message to a network element such as network element 4 (ghost user agent) which is a device always connected to the proxy server. The proxy server 2, or the server 4 may be adapted 25 to periodically try to forward any stored message (using SIP) to the user equipment 3. A maximum lifetime period can be defined for undelivered messages saved in the storing network element such as server 4. Upon expiry of the lifetime period, stored undelivered messages will be 30 cancelled.

As discussed above, the message payload may also be re-addressed to another address when the receiving user should not be reachable or occupied or the like, and may be 35 addressed e.g. to the e-mail address (see the parameters

stored for user C in Fig. 1), a MMS server, a SMSC, or the like.

Fig. 7 shows a flow chart illustrating method steps 5 executed in an embodiment of the invention. Steps 701 to 703 may be executed in a sender which may be the user equipment 1 of user A. In step 701, a messaging (i.e. no signalling) message to be sent is received which message may be input by a user via a terminal such as keyboard, 10 digital camera and the like. On some embodiments message is received from another network element such as a messaging gateway acting as a gateway between the messaging system of the SIP based network and the WAP service centers connected to the GSM network. An identifier is included into, or 15 added to, the message in step 702. The message and the identifier may be included into a protocol word such as SIP. Thereafter the message is sent in step 703. The sent message will be received, in step 704, by the addressed network element such as server 2 of Figs. 1, 2.

20 The reachability of the recipient indicated in the message or transmitting protocol is checked in steps 705 and 706. When the recipient is reachable, the message is sent to the recipient in step 707. When, to the contrary, the recipient is presently not reachable, e.g. busy or de-attached from the network, the process proceeds to step 708 where the identifier of the received message is checked in order to decide on the temporary storing (step 709) of the message in an internal or external memory, e.g. in server 4, or 25 immediate discarding of the message (step 710), depending on the status of the identifier. The status of the identifier may e.g. have the value "00" for storing, "11" for discarding, "01" for "Notify sender after delivery to the Recipient", and the like.

When a message is stored, the step 705 may be repeatedly executed until reachability of the sender is detected. The step 705 may additionally or alternatively be triggered e.g. when the recipient attaches again to the network. When 5 reachability is found, the stored message is read out of the memory, and is sent to the recipient, e.g. from server 4 or 2.

Fig. 8 shows a block diagram of network elements of an 10 embodiment of a system according to the invention. A sender 80 includes a receiving means 801 for receiving a messaging (i.e. no signalling) message (user traffic) to be sent, and is adapted to execute step 701 of Fig. 7. The message may be input via a terminal such as keyboard, digital camera 15 and the like, or from another network element. The sender 80 further comprises an including means 802 for adding, or including, an identifier into the message, and eventually including the message into one or more protocol words of a messaging enabling protocol such as SIP, so as to carry out step 702. A sending means 803 is adapted to execute step 703, i.e. to send the protocol word(s) including the message and the identifier to a serving network element 81 20 such as server 2.

25 The serving network element 81 is adapted to carry out the steps 704 to 710 shown in Fig. 7. The serving network element comprises a receiving means 811 for receiving messages, e.g. the protocol word(s) sent from sender 80, and a reachability checking means 812 which checks whether 30 the intended recipient 82 can be accessed so that the message can be promptly delivered to the intended recipient 82. If yes, the message is sent to a sending means 813 of the serving network element 81. The sending means 813 sends the message to the indicated receiving address, i.e. to the 35 recipient 82.

When the checking means 812 detects that the recipient 81 can presently not be reached, it transfers the message to a checking means 814 which is adapted to check whether the message is to be stored or discarded. The checking means 5 814 performs this check by examining the identifier included in the message or protocol word. When the identifier does not command a storing of the message, the message is discarded by a discarding means 816 which e.g. actively deletes the message or simply inhibits a storing 10 thereof. Otherwise, when the identifier commands the storing of the message if not promptly deliverable, the checking means 814 sends the message to a storing means 815 which may be an internal memory or an external storage such as in server 4.

15 When the checking means 812 subsequently detects that the recipient 81 may be reached again, it either retrieves the stored message from the storing means 815 and transfers the message to the sending means 813, or instructs the storing 20 means 815 to transmit the message to the recipient 81 via other means, e.g. server 4.

According to one embodiment of the invention, the header 11, in particular, the Request-Disposition part, of the SIP 25 protocol word is newly defined so as to include an identifier, preferably the protocol portion "store command field" which may contain the commands "do-not-store" or "store-and-forward-if-not-reached" according to the setting of user A. The first header "do-not-store" informs the 30 system that the message is of instant nature and is to be discarded instantly if it cannot be promptly delivered. The latter header "store-and-forward-if-not-reached" means that the message should be stored (usually in the local proxy or another storage) and forwarded, if the receiving equipment 35 is presently unreachable or occupied, or the like. The proxy will be subscribed to a present status service for

being informed on the presence status, and will wait for the receiver to become on-line. As shown in Fig. 2, the proxy server 2 is adapted to send a notification (step 4) to the original sender 1 using SIP NOTIFY method, after the 5 delivery of the message to the user B (200 OK message).

When the receiving user B is becoming on-line again, the network recognises this situation, e.g. by receiving a SIP REGISTER message or PDP-context activation request. The 10 CSCF and home location server 2 inform the SIP store and forward server 4 about this situation, either using a SIP protocol or any other protocol. The servers 2 and 4 may be also be co-located inside the same machine.

15 Although preferred embodiments of the invention have been described above, the invention is not limited to the details thereof. Instead of SIP protocol, any other instant messaging protocol can be used provided it is no specific protocol intended only for messaging service but a protocol 20 primarily intended for establishment of connection between two (or more) terminals.

CLAIMS

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1. Communication system comprising a plurality of network elements, wherein a connection from a first network element to a second network element can be established using messages according to a protocol, which protocol also allows 10 the sending of a messaging message between a sender and a recipient, wherein at least one message according to the protocol includes an identifier specifying whether or not the message is to be stored in case it cannot be promptly delivered to the recipient.

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2. Communication system according to claim 1, wherein a message according to the protocol comprises a protocol header and the identifier is part of the protocol header.

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3. Communication system according to claim 1, wherein the identifier is an extension field in a message according to the protocol.

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4. Communication system according to any of the preceding claims, wherein the connection is bi-directional.

5. Communication system according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein the protocol is a Session Initiation Protocol (SIP).

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6. Communication system according to claim 5, wherein the message is contained in an Invite request.

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7. Communication system according to claim 5, wherein the message is contained in an INFO message.

8. Communication system according to any one of the preceding claims, comprising a server for storing the message.

5 9. Communication system according to claim 8, wherein the server is a server for storing and forwarding the message.

10 10. Communication system according to any one of the preceding claims, comprising a serving network element for transmitting the message from the sender to the recipient, the serving network element being adapted to control the storing of the message in case the recipient is presently unreachable, to detect a subsequent reachability of the 15 recipient, and to initiate the forwarding of the stored message to the recipient when detecting the reachability of the recipient.

20 11. Communication system according to claim 8, 9 or 10, wherein the server is a proxy server of the recipient.

12. Communication system according to any of claims 8 to 11, wherein the server is adapted to periodically try to send the stored message to the recipient.

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13. Communication system according to any of claims 8 to 12, wherein the server is adapted to forward the message to another address indicated in a database of the server or another network element, or in the protocol.

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14. Communication system according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein a store-and-forward command can be set in the identifier.

35 15. A method to be performed in a communication system

comprising a plurality of network elements, wherein a connection from a first network element to a second network element can be established using at least one message according to a protocol which also allows the sending of a 5 messaging message between a sender and a recipient, wherein an identifier specifying that the message is to be stored in case it cannot be promptly delivered to the recipient is included in at least one message according to the protocol, and the message is stored if it cannot be promptly delivered 10 to the recipient.

16. Method according to claim 15, wherein the message is stored in a server.

15 17. Method according to claim 16, wherein the server is a server for storing and forwarding the message.

18. Method according to any one of claims 15 to 17, wherein a serving network element controls the storing of the 20 message in case the recipient is presently unreachable, detects a subsequent reachability of the recipient, and initiates the forwarding of the stored message to the recipient when detecting the reachability of the recipient.

25 19. Method according to claim 16, 17 or 18, wherein the server is a proxy server of the recipient.

20. Method according to claim 16, 17, 18 or 19, wherein the server is adapted to periodically try to send the stored 30 message to the recipient.

21. Method according to any of claims 16 to 20, wherein the server is adapted to forward the message to another address indicated in a database of the server or another 35 network element, or in the protocol.

22. Method according to any one of claims 15 to 21, wherein a store-and-forward command can be set in the identifier.

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23. A network element for a communication system comprising a plurality of network elements, wherein a connection from a first network element to a second network element can be established using at least one message according to a protocol which also allows the sending of a messaging message from a sender to a recipient, wherein the network element is adapted to include in at least one message according to the protocol an identifier specifying that the message is to be stored in case it cannot be promptly delivered to the recipient.

24. A network element for a communication system comprising a plurality of network elements, wherein a connection from a first network element to a second network element can be established using at least one message according to a protocol which also allows the sending of a messaging message from a sender to a recipient, wherein the network element is adapted

25 to receive a message according to the protocol, the message including an identifier specifying that the message is to be stored in case it cannot be promptly delivered to the recipient, and

to store the message if it can not be promptly delivered to the recipient.

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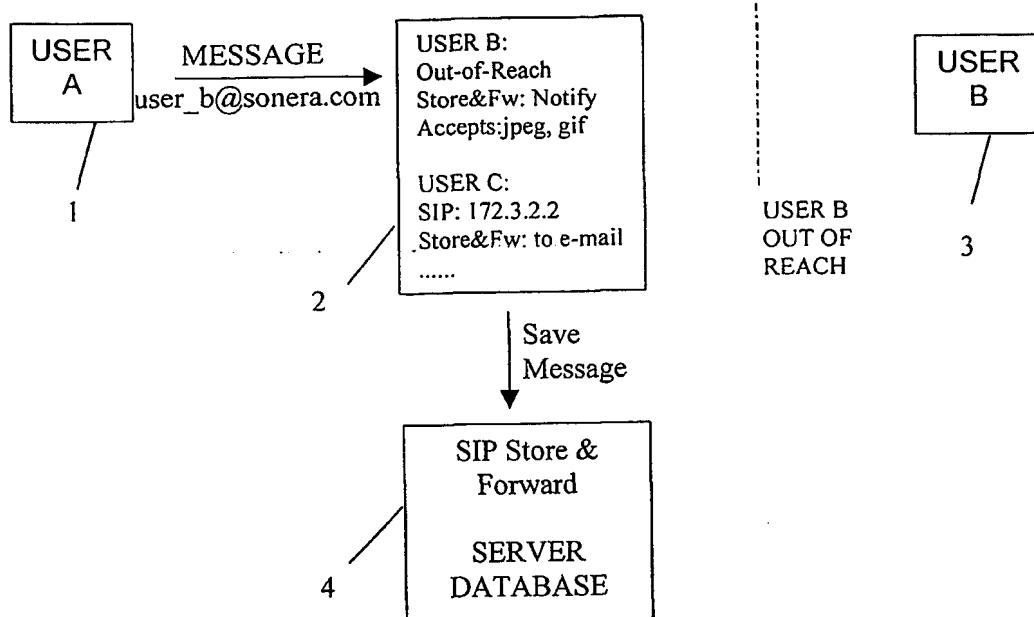


Fig. 1

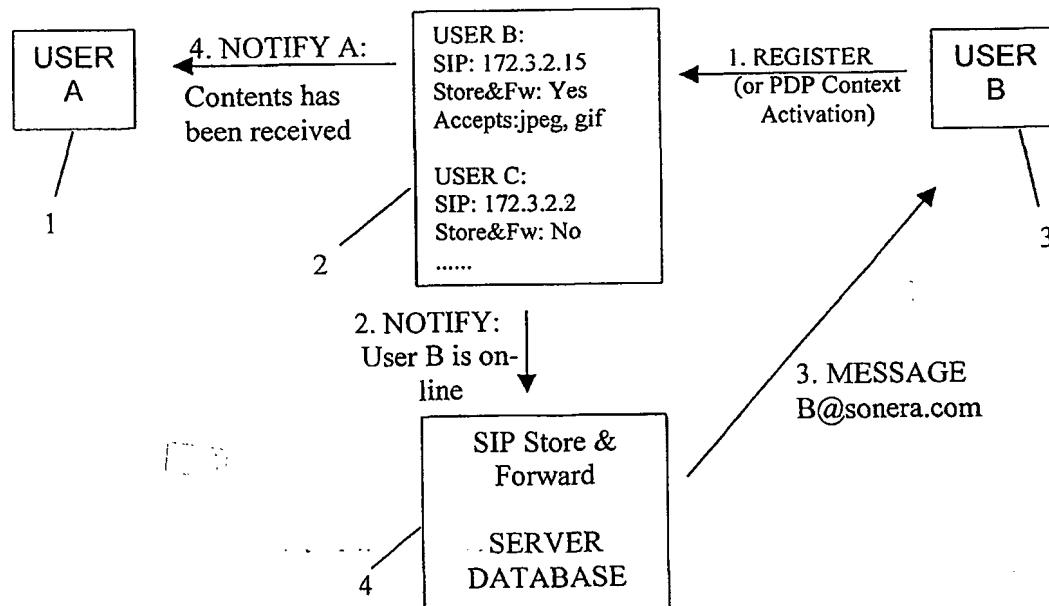


Fig. 2

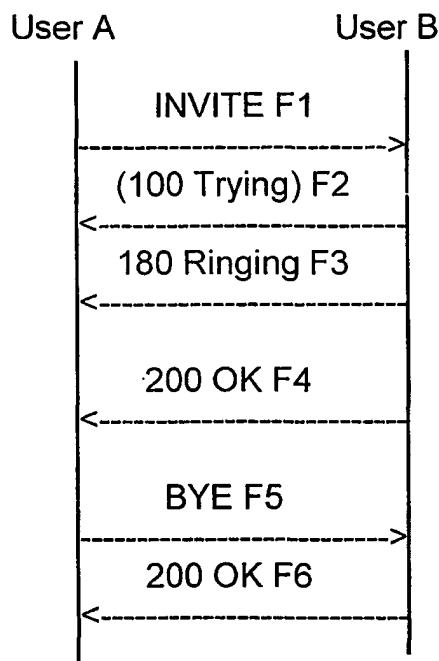
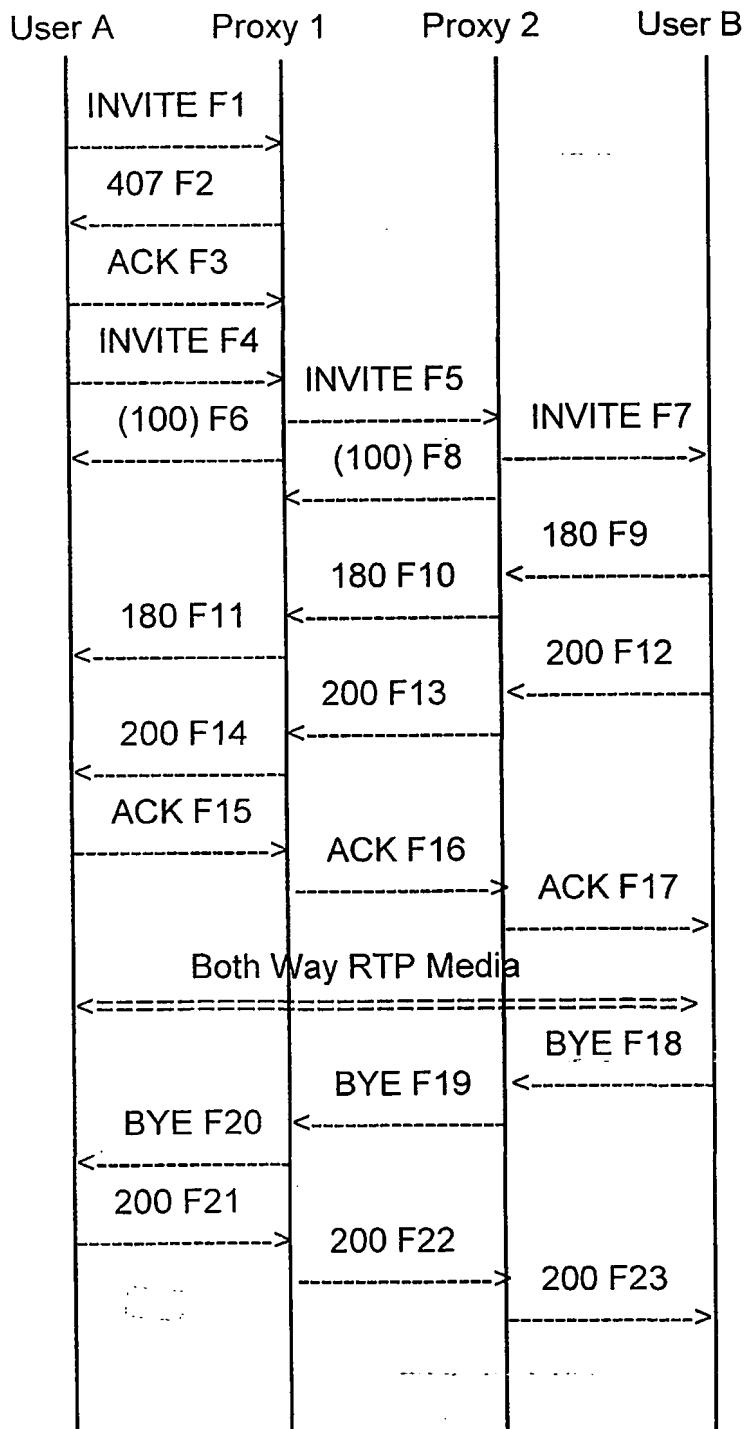


Fig. 3

**Fig. 4**

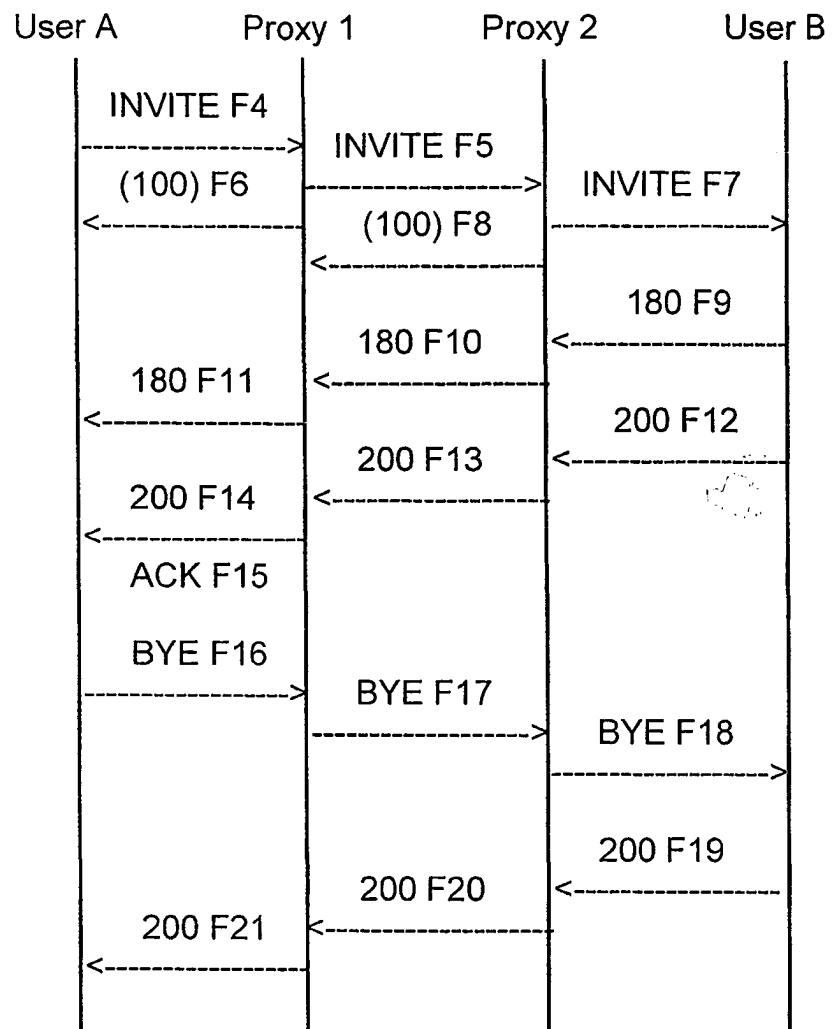


Fig. 5

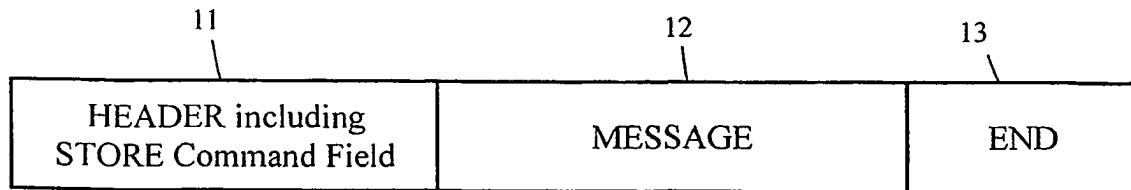


Fig. 6

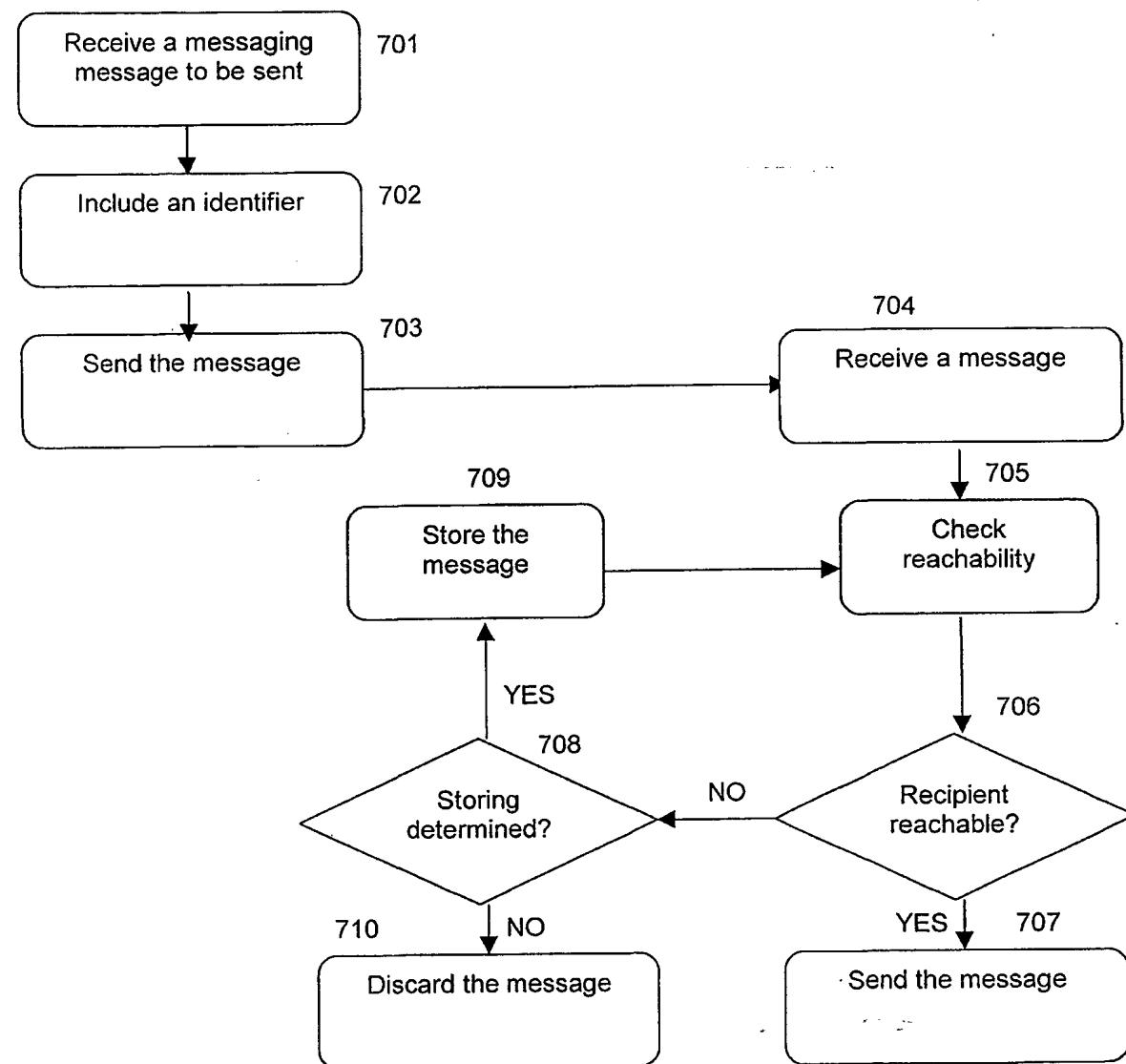


Fig. 7

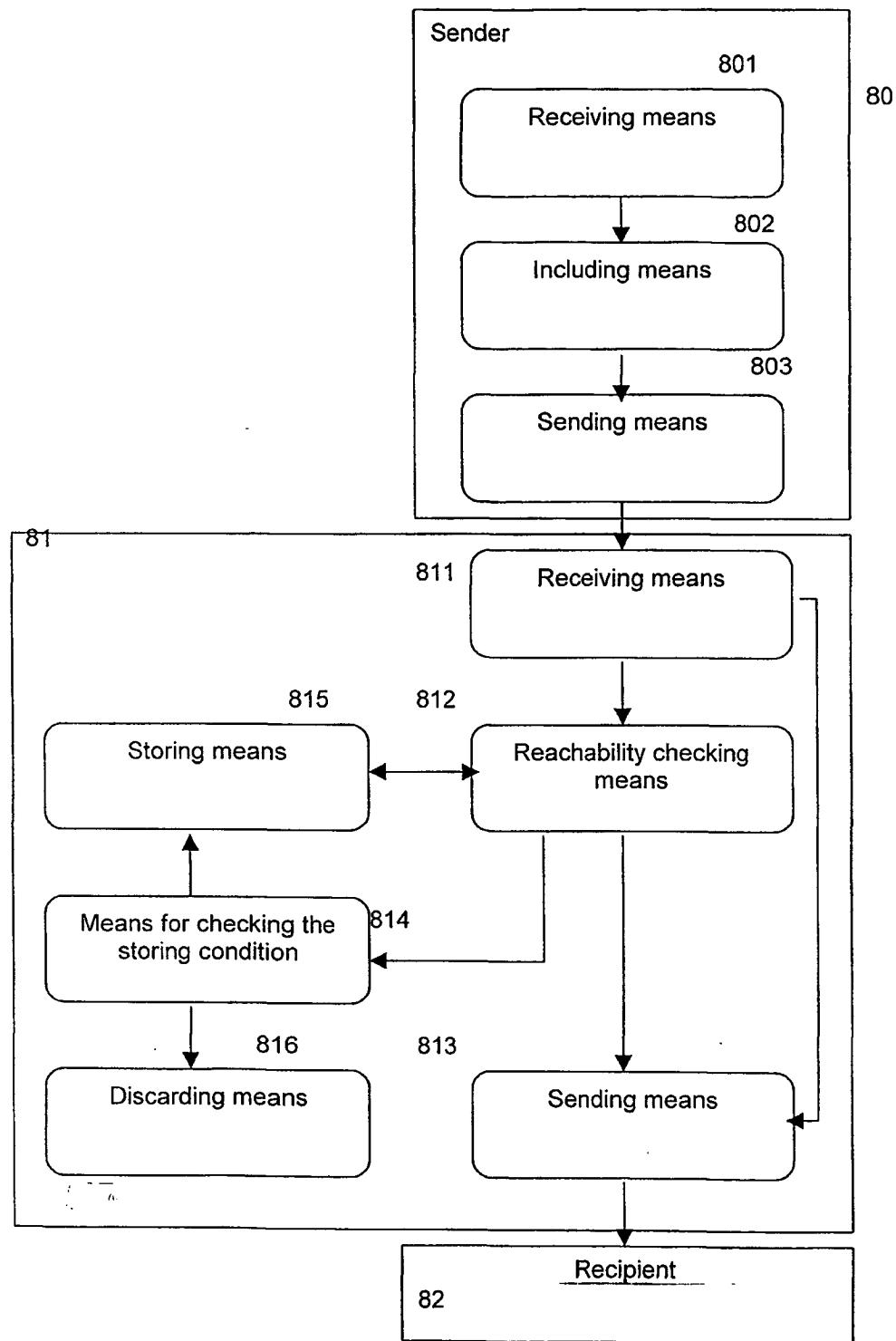


Fig. 8

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International Application No
PCT/EP 00/06708

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER
IPC 7 H04L12/58 H04Q3/00 H04L29/06

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)
IPC 7 H04L H04Q

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practical, search terms used)

EPO-Internal, WPI Data, PAJ, INSPEC, COMPENDEX, IBM-TDB

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
A	EP 0 833 532 A (KABUSHIKI KAISHA TOSHIBA) 1 April 1998 (1998-04-01) column 7, line 4 - line 12 column 11, line 11 -column 12, line 16	1,15,23, 24
A	SCHULZRINNE H ET AL: "INTERNET TELEPHONY: ARCHITECTURE AND PROTOCOLS - AN IETF PERSPECTIVE" COMPUTER NETWORKS AND ISDN SYSTEMS, NORTH HOLLAND PUBLISHING. AMSTERDAM, NL, vol. 31, no. 3, 11 February 1999 (1999-02-11), pages 237-255, XP000700321 ISSN: 0169-7552 page 245, right-hand column, line 1 -page 250, left-hand column, line 31	1,15,23, 24

Further documents are listed in the continuation of box C.

Patent family members are listed in annex.

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Date of the actual completion of the international search

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INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

Information on patent family members

International Application No

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Patent document cited in search report	Publication date	Patent family member(s)		Publication date
EP 0833532	A	01-04-1998	JP 3041244 B	15-05-2000
			JP 10107919 A	24-04-1998
			AU 3924297 A	02-04-1998
			US 6044278 A	28-03-2000